

EXTENSION OF RECORDED RANGE OF THE BOURKE PARROT (*Neophema bourkii*)

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In July 1949, Mr. Murray Spicer, of Banjiwarne Station, described to me a small parrot which visited the wells on the station at dawn and at dusk and only rarely drank in broad daylight. The description of both the bird and its habits appeared to fit the Bourke Parrot (*Neophema bourkii*).

As Banjiwarne Station, about 85 miles north of Leonora as the crow flies, was outside the recorded range of the Bourke Parrot, I decided to visit this area in search of further information on this and other species which had been reported there. Mr. J. S. Campbell, of Leonora, readily agreed to my accompanying one of his transport units so that, on August 29 and 30, I was able to cover over 300 miles of the country to the north of Leonora.

My search for the Bourke Parrot began auspiciously for, when only seven miles north of Leonora, I saw plainly a flock of about 12 birds which rose from the roadside and flew towards the adjacent mulga scrub. A cock bird which alighted on a fence was seen particularly well. The time was 0710 hours.

During the afternoon, while traversing Yandals Station, two further flocks in two separate localities were encountered.

Wanggannoo Station, 110 miles due north of Leonora, was not reached until late in the evening. In response to an inquiry Mr. J. L. Boladeras, the owner, informed me that the Bourke Parrot occurred there in numbers and that I should be able to hear the birds visiting the well near the homestead before daylight. Mr. Boladeras further informed me that there are eight wells on the property and that each of these is visited by the parrots night and morning. Only when they are cut off from their water supply at normal times do they visit the wells in full daylight. When the species first appeared at Wanggannoo Station four or five years ago it was a novelty not only to the white residents but to the natives also. Mr. Boladeras secured a specimen, forwarded it to the Western Australian Museum, and later received an acknowledgment from the Curator identifying the bird as a Bourke Parrot.

The following morning I commenced listening at 0500 hours. By 0520 hours calls from the adjacent mulga could be distinctly heard, so I stationed myself near the homestead well. At 0530 hours the birds began to move in. Rather to my surprise, they came in at low level. So far as I could judge by their flight calls, they were in pairs or small parties. It was still too dark to see the birds, though the light of dawn was strengthening rapidly and a few minutes later I was able to see eight birds drinking at the overflow from a trough. There were three other equally suitable drinking places which I could not see from where I stood, so that the number of birds actually seen is no indication of the number of

birds present, I had no means of estimating the number of birds in the vicinity but from the scattered calls it seemed unlikely that there were less than 50 birds present.

By 0545 drinking appeared to be almost complete and the birds were dispersing. Two passed within three or four feet of me, flying at about two feet from the ground. With these, as with some of the incoming birds, I could hear a distinct whistle of wings, rather like the sound made by a Crested Pigeon in flight, but not so loud. One latecomer arrived at 0600 hours. This bird alighted at about 10 yards from the trough, walked to it and drank leisurely, departing at 0605 hours. The sun rose at 0615 hours. The weather was fine and clear.

Another party of Bourke Parrots was encountered on the return journey between 20 and 30 miles south of Wangganoo homestead. This flock, like those seen previously, was in typical mulga country.

Birds seen during the daytime appeared to be active, so that it is, apparently, only in the matter of drinking that they are crepuscular.

The low flight of *Neophema bourkii* when moving to water is in sharp contrast to the habit of *Neophema elegans*, which often drops almost vertically from a height of perhaps 200 or 250 feet. *N. elegans* usually drinks in broad daylight, but does not go to roost until well into the dusk.

SUMMARY

The foregoing observations:—

(1) Extend the recorded range of *Neophema bourkii* southward and eastward from the Cue district to:

- (a) Wangganoo Station, 110 miles north of Leonora (Mr. L. Boladeras).
- (b) Banjiwarne Station, 85 miles north of Leonora (Mr. M. Spieer).
- (c) Seven miles north of Leonora (the writer).

(2) Establish the existence of a fairly strong population of these birds in the vicinity of Wangganoo and Banjiwarne Stations, i.e., about 100 miles to the north of Leonora.

(3) Indicate that the species has established itself in this area only recently.

Since writing the foregoing notes on the occurrence of the Bourke Parrot in the Leonora district, I have to record a still further southerly extension of the range of the species.

On October 15 Miss F. J. Armstrong, of the Government School, Leonora, examined a Bourke Parrot which had been shot the previous day at a water catchment about three miles to the east of Gwalia. Gwalia lies two miles to the south of Leonora.

As the bird was too badly damaged to make a satisfactory specimen, Miss Armstrong secured one wing only for further examination. This wing is 107 mm. in length, agreeing closely with

the measurement—108 mm.—given by Dr. W. MacGillivray, *The Emu*, vol. 27, 1927, p. 67, for a young bird leaving the nest. The description obtained of the bird suggests a juvenile or a hen bird rather than an adult cock.

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Nesting of the Pied Cormorant off Rottnest Island.—I am indebted to a friend, Mr. B. Killington, for the following information on an apparently new, or at least unrecorded, breeding colony of the Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*). On May 16, 1949, a small colony of the Pied Cormorant was observed nesting on Dyer's Island, off the south coast of Rottnest Island. There were approximately 40 nests evident, but some were empty. The nestlings present were well developed, seeming to indicate that the breeding season was well advanced. There were about 30 young birds in the nests with about 60 adult birds in attendance, though this count of adults does not take into consideration those that may have been out foraging.

—DON REID, Wembley.

Marsh Terns Feeding in Association with Little Grebes.—On July 31, 1949 I visited Coolungup Lake (White Lake), East Rockingham, for the purpose of taking a census of the duck population. Though I had made a number of visits to the lake between March and July and had seen a few Grebes, I was surprised to see on this visit approximately 60 Little Grebes (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*) and two Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) in a close feeding flock. There was also a number of terns—probably Marsh Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*)—diving into the water around the grebes. At first I thought the terns were attacking the grebes but apparently all these birds were feeding on a similar food item which must have been very abundant or the grebes, when diving, disturbed food sought after by the terns.

—ANGUS ROBINSON, "Yanjettee," Coolup.

Young Ducks Leaving Elevated Nests.—My personal experience of observing wild ducks transporting their young from high nests differs from that recorded in the last issue of the *Naturalist* (p. 44). In early October, three years ago, I watched a female Black Duck transport four young ones from a nest about 30 feet up a big tree stump in a gravel pit about three miles from here. The duck alighted on the edge of the nest hole and backed half-way into the nest. A young duck then climbed on to the mother's back and sprawled its feet well into the mother's back feathers. The mother then launched herself and flew with the young one to a pool about a hundred yards away. I watched her carry four in this manner, there being already several in the pool.

A friend, Mr. George Turner, of Yarloop, told me that he has also witnessed this action, but in this instance the three young were being carried about a quarter of a mile.

—W. MILES, "Brooklyn Ridge," Wagerup.